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SUBJECT: JUNBESH SEEKS COMPROMISE ON PRESIDENTIAL CONTINUITY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Junbesh-e-Milli leaders say the majority-Uzbek party is willing to play a constructive role in negotiations with President Karzai and other political leaders over post-5/22 executive authority. Most Junbesh leaders insist Karzai must step aside after the constitutional expiration of his term, but are encouraging the United Front and other opposition groups to be more open to compromise with the president on the details of a caretaker government. Junbesh fully supports the 8/20 election date and promises to discourage supporters from organizing protests if Karzai remains in office through the inauguration.

Looking to Play a Constructive Role

¶2. (SBU) Junbesh executive committee member and Jowzjan MP Faizullah Zaki told PolOff on 2/24 that the party decided this month to support and prepare for the 8/20 election date. The party opposes moving the election to an earlier date to comply with the Constitution. "It's too late to go back now," Zaki said. Zaki has pushed the party to focus on the issue of post-5/22 executive authority, asking colleagues to put off a decision on its presidential endorsement until "this more important issue" is solved. Like other opposition groups, most Junbesh leaders believe Karzai should either step aside in favor of a caretaker government after 5/22 or not stand for re-election if he decides to stay in office through the conclusion of the election. The suspicion that Karzai will use government agencies to aid his campaign underlies this position.

¶3. (SBU) Junbesh Chairman Sayed Noorullah earlier told PolOff the government must focus on improving the security situation to hold an election, but needed a legal rationale if it wanted to remain in power after 5/22. Unlike other Junbesh leaders, Noorullah has held out the option of supporting Karzai, though he understands the bulk of his party prefers the president leave office. Noorullah would also support Upper House Speaker Mojaddedi serving as caretaker president. Despite their willingness to find a compromise solution, both Noorullah and Zaki have expressed frustration that Karzai has ignored Junbesh after party founder Gen. Dostum departed for Turkey in December.

Downplaying Crisis

¶4. (SBU) Zaki is exploring incentives to draw Karzai into negotiations with the opposition and downplay the potential for a crisis that could weaken the government at a time of increased Taliban attacks. Zaki suggests an argument whereby Karzai steps down before 5/22, a non-partisan figure assumes the presidency, and the current Cabinet remains in office. Zaki and Noorullah have agreed to push their allies in other political parties to be open to compromise, Zaki targeting the United Front and Noorullah appealing to his contacts in Hazara leader Mohaqeq's Hezb-e-Wahdat faction.

¶5. (SBU) PolOff outlined the U.S. position: resolution of

the executive authority issue required Afghan political leaders (including Karzai and key opposition leaders) to work together to find an agreed-to political solution. The U.S. would advocate no specific outcome, but would insist the eventual solution preserve the 8/20 election, maintain a strong government during the peak fighting season, and support the authority and goals of the Constitution. Those who resisted a sensible solution to the problem could face repercussions from voters in the election or in their future relations with the United States. Zaki appreciated the U.S. focus on providing security and its neutrality in political matters.

¶6. (SBU) Zaki said Junbesh will promote a rational dialogue in all of its discussions with other parties, including Karzai. Junbesh has no interest in organizing protests to oppose the government if Karzai remains in office after 5/22. "The Taliban will take advantage (of protests)," Zaki said. "We're not going to be responsible for opening up a target for their attacks."

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